

Irfan Habib, "Economic History of the  
Delhi Sultanate"

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## ECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE DELHI SULTANATE— AN ESSAY IN INTERPRETATION

Irfan Habib

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate was undoubtedly an important event in the political history of India. The question is whether it marked any kind of break in the country's economic history as well. Though Kosambi recognized that changes did occur with the coming of "the Islamic raiders", he regarded them as no more than intensifying elements already present in Indian "feudalism".<sup>1</sup> But Kosambi's treatment of the Sultanate, though not without his usual insights, was brief; and it does not seem to have been his intention to offer more than a few suggestive comments on the basis of a selective study of the evidence.

The standpoint which, for obvious reasons, has gained a larger number of votaries in the more recent period, is to view the Sultanate as marking a break in India's economic history, not, however, through advancing the economic interests of society, but through initiating a process of denudation and destruction of its material and human resources. The names of Professor Lallanji Gopal, who has discovered that poverty in India began with the coming of the Muslims,<sup>2</sup> and Professor K. S. Lal, who has made the equally startling discovery that the sultans reduced the population of the country by over a third,<sup>3</sup> occur to one immediately as scholarly exponents of this particular point of view. In essence, their argument rests on the evidence about what Elliot termed "the murders and massacres" perpetrated by the "Muhammadans".<sup>4</sup> For reasons which, owing to the length required to expound them, I have had to relegate to an Appendix, I cannot consider it an interpretation of the Sultanate which any economic historian need take seriously.

Quite a different assessment of the economic changes accompanying the establishment of the Sultanate was offered by Professor Mohammad Habib as early as 1952.<sup>5</sup> As his *Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni* and other writings amply show, few other historians have been so conscious of some of the negative aspects of medieval Islamic civilization, or so sensitive to the destruction and devastation that the wars and campaigns of the

1 D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, 2nd edn (Bombay, 1975; first published, 1956), p. 370 ff. Kosambi says that the crucial metamorphosis of the feudal period was completed, after several false starts, in the reign of Firūz Tughluq (1351-88): "Ultimately, Firūz Tughluq yielded to feudalism from below" (p. 377).

2 Lallanji Gopal, *The Economic Life of Northern India, c. A. D. 700-1200* (Delhi, 1965), pp. 257-61.

3 K. S. Lal, *Growth of Muslim Population in Medieval India* (Delhi, 1973), pp. 26-156.

4 Henry Elliot, Preface (1849), *History of India As Told by Its Own Historians*, ed. J. Dowson, Vol. I (London, 1867).

5 Introduction to a new edition of Elliot and Dowson's *History of India As Told by Its Own Historians*, Vol. II (Aligarh, 1952).

sultans wrought on the inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Yet Habib believed that the new regime was qualitatively different from the one it had supplanted and that it released social forces which created an economic organization considerably superior to the one that had existed before. He suggested that there was an expansion of the towns and an important alteration in agrarian relationships. In these changes that the new regime helped to bring about, the new ruling classes did not act from altruistic motives. The circumstances were such that "in the pursuit of their personal careers, the selfishness of which no one should deny", they were "to an extent" also "sub-serving the public good".<sup>2</sup> This he ascribed to the fact that the new rulers were interested in products of artisan-manufactures, and not the castes of artisans, and so were indifferent to the imposition of caste-restraints that had burdened the town artisans and checked inter-professional mobility in pre-Sultanate India. From the villages, the rulers wanted more revenue; and so the greatest of them, 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī, eliminated the "intermediaries" who used to take a large share in the surplus, and oppress the lower peasantry.<sup>3</sup> Professor Habib felt that the changes were so fundamental as to deserve respectively the designations of "urban revolution" and "rural revolution".

There can be no doubt that Professor Habib made an important contribution in suggesting that the economy of the Sultanate cannot be seen as a mere continuation of the one previously existing; and he indicated important aspects that needed to be explored. In detail, however, his numerous suggestions needed actual substantiation from evidence and must remain open to revision in its light. Some of his formulations, particularly those tending to evaluate changes in the twelfth century in language applicable to modern social revolutions,<sup>4</sup> appear to be overstatements, even if the changes were exactly such as he had suggested.

Little work has, however, been done to follow up Habib's numerous insights and substantiate or revise his depiction of the economic and social changes during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some of his broad statements occur again in Professor K. A. Nizami's work, but with little additional evidence, and without that critical view of Islamic society and the destruction accompanying the invasions, which so distinguishes Professor Habib's interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

1 His *Sultan Mahmūd of Ghaznī*, written in 1926 and revised in 1951, contained moving passages on the results of the invasions of Sultan Maḥmūd and the bitter legacy left by him (see, especially, pp. 83-7 of the reprint of the revised edn, Delhi, 1967). In another work, while commenting on Amīr Khusrau's eulogies of 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī's campaigns against Hindu rulers, Habib summed up the result in that mystic poet's own words, "Next you saw bones on the earth" (*Hazrat Amīr Khusrau of Delhi*, Bombay, 1927, p. 105).

2 Introduction to a new edition of Elliot and Dowson, op. cit., p. 82.

3 Ibid. p. 81.

4 The statement, for example, that "the so-called Ghorian conquest of India was really a revolution of Indian city-labour led by the Ghorian Turks" (ibid. p. 54), can only be regarded in retrospect by one who saw it admiringly while it was being drafted, as a very unfortunately worded formulation.

5 See K. A. Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (Aligarh, 1961). In the picture that Professor Nizami draws of the social order as actually functioning in the

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2 Ibid. p. 547.

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To begin with, there does seem to be considerable evidence to support the thesis that the Sultanate saw a considerable expansion of the urban economy. Three interrelated developments appear to have occurred: (a) there was a considerable growth in the size and possibly number of the towns; (b) there was a marked expansion in craft-production; and (c) there was a corresponding expansion in commerce.

Ibn Battūṭa who saw Delhi in 1330 (after Muḥammad Tughluq had shifted much of its population to Daulatabad) described it as of enormous extent and population, the largest city in the whole of the Islamic East.<sup>1</sup> And yet he says that Daulatabad, too, was large enough to rival Delhi in size.<sup>2</sup> The extensive ruins of the Sultanate Delhi endorse Ibn Battūṭa's statements about that city. There were numerous other large cities, too, which we can enumerate, such as Lahore, Multan, Anhilwara (Patan), Cambay and Lakhnauti. These are mentioned and partly described in our sources but without any reliable indication of their size. This kind of evidence by itself is, of course, rather weak, especially because comparable accounts of towns of earlier times are not available to us.<sup>3</sup> But it is important in that it corroborates the information we have about the growth of crafts and commerce.

The increase in craft-production was signified by a number of changes or improvements in technology which can be ascribed to the period of the Sultanate.<sup>4</sup>

First of all, in the cotton textile sector the arrival of the spinning-wheel (*charkha*) was bound to increase the production of yarn manifold. This important mechanical device is referred to, first of all, in Ṣāmi's *Futūḥ-s-Salāṭin* (1350), as an instrument to which women should apply themselves.<sup>5</sup> As pointed out by Lynn White Jr, the spinning

Islamic world, no defect or weakness is recognized. The great social distinctions and the repression of many sections of society (the *mawālī* under the Umayyids; and of the slaves and peasants generally) are either ignored, denied or rationalized (pp. 1-14). In the description of India on the eve of the Turkish conquests, the darker colour is, on the other hand, uniformly predominant (pp. 65-74). The *Arthashastra* is used freely as evidence, though some 1,500 years separate it from the period in question. The Sultanate is deemed to be playing a mission of liberation: "The substitution of forced labour by free labour had a tremendous effect on the economic condition of the Indian masses" (p. 323). No evidence is offered in substantiation, unless, conceivably, it is contained in the next sentence: "The fact that the Hindu moneylenders were in a position to advance money to the Muslim aristocracy is too significant to be ignored". The masses presumably became so prosperous as to turn into moneylenders.

1 Ibn Battūṭa, *Rihla*, text (Beirut, 1964), pp. 414-5.

2 Ibid. p. 547.

3 The evidence for eleventh and twelfth centuries, such as it is, is summarized in R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c. 300-1200* (University of Calcutta, 1965), pp. 245-6.

4 See D. D. Kosambi's brief but perceptive remarks about "the Islamic raiders ... breaking down hidebound custom in the adoption and transmission of new technique" (*Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, p. 370). A preliminary attempt at identifying some of these improvements was made in my "Technological Changes and Society in the 13th and 14th Centuries", Presidential Address, Medieval India Section, Indian History Congress, 31st Session (Varanasi, 1969).

5 Ṣāmi, *Futūḥ-s-Salāṭin*, ed. A. S. Usha (Madras, 1948), p. 134.

wheel was unknown in ancient India.<sup>1</sup> It had, however, come to Iran by the twelfth century, being mentioned in the verses of Persian poets.<sup>2</sup> It, therefore, seems practically certain that the spinning wheel came to India from Iran probably in the thirteenth century, so as to spread rapidly enough for the kind of statement made by 'Iṣāmī. The introduction of the cotton-carder's bow, which I previously thought was also a "Muslim" importation, might possibly have reached India before the twelfth century; but it was probably fully generalized here only in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> There is also the strong possibility that treadles, displayed in a seventeenth-century miniature of Kabīr at the loom,<sup>4</sup> were introduced during these centuries. There is no indication, to judge from parts of the loom described in Sanskrit lexicons, that treadles existed in ancient India.<sup>5</sup> They appear in Europe for the first time only in the late twelfth century.<sup>6</sup> It is, therefore, probable that the introduction of this convenient device enabling the weaver to work much faster took place in India during the period of the Sultanate. With the spinning wheel as the central innovation quickening immeasurably the process of spinning yarn, and with the carder's bow and weaver's treadles as two possible additions, it is likely that there took place a sizable expansion in the production of cotton cloth. It may well have been responsible for that larger use of cloth by ordinary people, which a comparison of depictions in ancient Indian sculptures and paintings and Mughal-period miniatures so markedly brings out.<sup>7</sup>

A similar expansion possibly took place in what was a luxury sector, the weaving of silk cloth. Sericulture, or rearing of the mulberry silk-worm, is not known to have been practised in India before the Sultanate. It is first noticed in Bengal during the earlier part of the fifteenth century,<sup>8</sup> and in Kashmir only in the middle of the sixteenth.<sup>9</sup> Naturally, indigenous production of silk would have greatly cheapened the material for India's silk-weaving industry, which seems to have been dependent hitherto on imports.<sup>10</sup>

1 "Tibet, India and Malaya, As Sources of Western Medieval Technology", *The American Historical Review*, lxxv, no. 3 (April 1960), 517.

2 Quotations from Anwārī and Nizāmī in the *Lughatnāma* of Dihkhudā, ed. Muḥammad Mu'īn, fasc. 50 (Teheran, 1338), pp. 162-3.

3 See "Technological Changes and Society in the 13th and 14th Centuries", pp. 7-8, for evidence from Arabic lexicons that the device was definitely in use in the Islamic world in the fourteenth century. A verse of the poet Astruḍḍīn Akhsikātī, quoted in *Bahār-i Ajam*, s. v. *panba-zadan*, which I came across later, establishes its presence in the eleventh century in Iran. But Moti Chandra in *Journal of Indian Textile History*, v (1960), 24, cites two eleventh-twelfth century Sanskrit dictionaries, *Valjayanī* and *Abhidhānacintāmañī*, for explanation of *piñjana*, which he takes to mean the cotton carder's bow. The exact words used in the dictionaries would be important; I regret I have not been able to check them so far.

4 For example, a seventeenth-century Mughal miniature in Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Peoples of Asia, *Album of Indian and Persian Miniatures* (Moscow, 1962), No. 66.

5 See the parts of loom mentioned in Moti Chandra, op.cit., pp. 24-5.

6 Lynn White, Jr. *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (New York, 1960), pp. 117, 173.

7 "Technological Changes and Society in the 13th and 14th Centuries", p. 10-1.

8 Ma Huan, *Ying-Yai Sheng-lan*, tr., J. V. G. Mills (Cambridge, 1970), p. 163.

9 Mirzā Haidar Dughlat, *Tārīkh-i Rashidī*, tr., N. Elias and D. Ross (London, 1895), p. 425.

10 Raw silk was a profitable item of export from Iran and western Afghanistan to India in the thirteenth century (*Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, ed. Habibi, Kabul, 1964, ii, 184).

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Another craft whose introduction from Persia took place very probably in the Sultanate period was carpet-weaving on the vertical loom; the definite evidence of the importation of this technique into India, however, dates from the Mughal period only.<sup>1</sup>

Other manufacturing crafts were also established, most notably that of paper. The earliest surviving piece of paper presumably made in India belongs to early thirteenth century and comes from Gujarat.<sup>2</sup> By the early fourteenth century, its manufacture had become so extensive that sweet-meat sellers in Delhi could pack their preparations in paper for the convenience of their customers.<sup>3</sup>

The building industry underwent a notable technological transformation. The crucial new elements were the cementing lime and vaulted roofing, with extensive use of true arch and dome. In totality the new technique made large roofed brick structures possible; and, looking at the ruins of Tughluqabad, as of later sites, one can, perhaps, say that it was the Sultanate which saw the conversion of middle class housing from wood and thatch into brick structures. At the same time the large scale on which the sultans built—'Alā'uddīn alone is said to have employed 70,000 craftsmen for his buildings,<sup>4</sup> and the structures left behind by Muḥammad Tughluq and Fīrūz Tughluq speak for themselves—reflects the enormous possibilities now opened for architecture.

The growth of commerce under the sultans is reflected pre-eminently in their larger coinage. The enormous amount of silver coinage of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with almost every year represented in catalogued collections (while gold coins, too, are quite numerous),<sup>5</sup> is in sharp contrast to the earlier centuries marked by a "paucity and debasement" of coined silver and even greater rarity of gold coinage.<sup>6</sup> The change from earlier centuries can be attributed most plausibly to a transfer of stored silver and gold into minted money as growth in commercial transactions necessitated larger use of the precious metals as circulating media.

This is corroborated by a large amount of evidence about merchants and their operations. The Multanis and Sahs were rich enough to extend loans to meet the expenses of the nobles of the sultans in the late thirteenth century;<sup>7</sup> and 'Alā'uddīn Khalji could entrust twenty lakh *tankas* (silver coins of about 168 grains in weight) to Multanis for

<sup>1</sup> See Irfan Habib, "Indian Textile Industry in the 17th Century", *Professor S. C. Sarkar Felicitation Volume* (New Delhi, 1976), p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> D. C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy* (Delhi, 1967), p. 67, fn.

<sup>3</sup> Hamid Qalandar's record of conversations of Shaikh Naṣṣruddīn, *Khairu'l Majālis*, ed. K. A. Nizami (Aligarh, 1959), p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī* (Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1862), p. 341.

<sup>5</sup> This can be checked from H. Nelson Wright, *The Coinage and Metrology of the Sultans of Delhi* (Delhi, 1936), which contains the catalogue of the author's own cabinet.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. L. Gopal, *The Economic Life of Northern India*, pp. 215-21. R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, pp. 255-62, suggests that larger use of money can be traced from the eleventh century, and that the existence of cash nexus in the Sultanate was the "culmination of the process that had begun in North India in the 11th and 12th centuries" (p. 259). But though a relative increase in coin circulation might have occurred in the two preceding centuries, the numismatic change is too striking to be taken as a mere continuation of a process already in motion.

<sup>7</sup> Baranī, op.cit., p. 120.

bringing products from afar.<sup>1</sup> The institution of brokers (*dallāls*), so bitterly denounced by Baranī,<sup>2</sup> might well have been an innovation of the early Sultanate, if A.J. Qaisar is right in his speculations.<sup>3</sup>

These developments seem to have been due to two initial causes, maintained and extended by a third. The first two were (a) the considerable immigration of artisans and merchants from the Islamic East to India, bringing with them their crafts, techniques and practices; and (b) the abundant supply of docile trainable labour, obtained through large-scale enslavement. The third, subsequent but, perhaps, equally, if not more important, factor was the establishment of a system whereby a very large share of agricultural surplus was appropriated for consumption in the towns.

For immigration, our evidence is extensive, in its references to individual immigrants though it does not entitle us to speak in quantitative terms of any kind. For a general statement, one may turn to 'Iṣāmī, writing of how Iltutmish peopled his "new city" of Delhi:

Numerous Saiyids of true lineage arrived there from Arabia. Numerous artisans (*kāṣibān*) from Iran (*Khurāsān*); numerous embroiderers (*naqshbandān*) from China; numerous scholars from Bukhara; numerous hermits and worshipful people from every region; craftsmen (*san'at-garān*) of every kind from every country; fair ones from every city; numerous assayers of jewels; innumerable jewel-merchants; Yū-nānī doctors and Byzantine (*Rūmī*) physicians; numerous men of learning from every land—all gathered together in that city, like insects around a lamp.<sup>4</sup>

While we must bear in mind the rhetoric and exaggerations of the passage, what strikes us is that craftsmen and artisans rub shoulders here with the devout and the learned among people whose arrival from Islamic lands made Delhi the great city it was. Clearly, the new techniques of paper manufacture, of making lime mortar and vaulted roof, and quite possibly also some weaving techniques (e.g., carpet-making) were established here through immigrant craftsmen.

It is doubtful whether these techniques could have been immediately adopted by Indian artisans, organized as they were in hereditary custom-bound castes, familiar with quite different traditions. For certain new crafts, no professional caste might have existed at all. In course of time there could have been adjustments within the caste system, as there must undoubtedly have been. But in the short run, the lack of craft-labour in specific spheres had to be overcome. One possible way that has been suggested is that of Indian artisans converting to Islam in order to live in the cities in freedom. But for this, as we have seen, no evidence has been presented. The far more plausible

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1 Ibid. p. 311.

2 Ibid. pp. 312-4.

3 *The Indian Historical Review*, i, no. 2 (September 1974), 220. If there was already a "revival" of commerce in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in western and central India, as indicated by R. S. Sharma in *Indian Feudalism*, pp. 246-55, the Sultanate surely greatly quickened the pace of this revival. It is interesting, indeed, that Professor Sharma ascribes the eleventh-twelfth century revival to trade with the Islamic East (p. 254).

4 'Iṣāmī, op.cit., 114-5.

1 Ḥasan Nizāmī,

2 Minhāj Sirāj,

3 Baranī, op.cit.

4 *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣir*

5 Baranī, op.cit.

6 *Khairu'l Majālī*

7 *Fawā'idul Fu'ā*

8 'Afīf, *Tārīkh-i*

9 Baranī, op.cit.,

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10 *Fawā'idul Fu'ā*

11 *Khairu'l Majāl*

12 *Fawā'idul Fu'ā*

13 *Khairu'l Majālī*

14 'Afīf, op.cit.,



process is its very opposite, namely, a process of enslavement of very large numbers of people, so as to provide cheap reserves of labour out of which new craftsmen could be created.

The evidence for such enslavement is there for all to see. So economically important was it that the success of a military campaign was often judged by the number of captives (*bardas*) obtained for enslavement. Quṭubuddīn Aibak's campaign in Gujarat in 1195 netted him 20,000 slaves; seven years later, a campaign against Kalinjar yielded 50,000.<sup>1</sup> In 1253 Balban obtained countless "horses and slaves" from an expedition to Ranthambhor.<sup>2</sup> In the instructions that 'Alā'uddīn Khalji is said to have issued to Malik Kāfir before his campaigns in the Deccan, it is assumed that "horses and slaves" would form a large part of the booty.<sup>3</sup> As the Sultanate began to be consolidated, the suppression of *mawās* or rebellious villages within its limits yielded a continuously rich harvest of slaves.<sup>4</sup> Balban's successful expedition in the Doab made slaves cheap in the capital.<sup>5</sup> How people of a village could be made slaves for non-payment of revenue is described in a fourteenth-century source;<sup>6</sup> and women so enslaved are mentioned in different contexts in two others.<sup>7</sup>

The plenitude of slaves thus collected is indicated by the numbers possessed by the sultans—50,000 slaves owned by Sultan 'Alā'uddīn Khalji and 1,80,000 by Firūz Tughluq.<sup>8</sup> Still more significant is Baranī's description of the large slave-market at Delhi, and the relative prices of slaves. A trained slave could be purchased for a price lower than that of the most inferior horse, and about the same as that of a milch buffalo. A woman slave for domestic work, or a young boy or girl cost still less.<sup>9</sup> Everyone, howsoever poor, among the respectable classes, had a slave. Nūr Turk, a mystic of Delhi (fl. 1236), living an austere life, maintained himself on the earnings of his male slave.<sup>10</sup> Nizāmu'ddīn, while a young student living in great poverty with his mother at Badaun, had yet a maid-slave (*kanīzak*).<sup>11</sup>

Even in the accounts we have of the slaves of non-commercial masters, we find them engaged in some craft. Nūr Turk's slave worked as a cotton-carder.<sup>12</sup> Domestic maid-slaves were made to work at spinning.<sup>13</sup> Of Firūz Tughluq's slaves, no less than 12,000 worked as artisans (*kāṣib*) of every kind.<sup>14</sup>

1 Hasan Nizāmī, *Tajū-l Ma'āshir*, Professor M. Habib's transcript of Asafiya Library Ms, pp. 424, 459.

2 Minhāj Sirāj, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, ii, 65.

3 Baranī, op.cit., p. 327.

4 *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, ii, 58.

5 Baranī, op.cit., p. 57.

6 *Khairu'l Majālis*, pp. 236-8.

7 *Fawā'idul Fu'ād*, ed. Latif Malik (Lahore, 1966), pp. 278, 340; Ibn Battūṭa, *Rihla*, p. 507.

8 'Afif, *Tārīkh-i Firūz-Shāhī* (Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1890), pp. 270, 272.

9 Baranī, op.cit., pp. 314-5. See also the prices of slaves in *Masālik-u-l Abṣār*, tr., I. H. Siddiqi and Q. M. Ahmad, p. 51.

10 *Fawā'idul Fu'ād*, pp. 334-5.

11 *Khairu'l Majālis*, p. 191.

12 *Fawā'idul Fu'ād*, pp. 334-5.

13 *Khairu'l Majālis*, pp. 138, 191.

14 'Afif, op.cit., p. 270.



The slaves thus provided the large, controlled supply of labour, which, with cheap boy and girl slaves available for work and training, could be set to work by master-craftsmen and merchants, as well as royal and aristocratic masters at different kinds of manufactures. The slave was mere chattel, and could not flee;<sup>1</sup> he could thus be forced to perform any kind of labour at the desire of the master, irrespective of the origins and caste of the slave.

By the very nature of the case, such use of slave-labour was a transitional phenomenon. Once the new immigrant crafts or skills were well established and the slaves turned, after some generations, into free artisans, upon obtaining or buying their freedom, the competition of free labour would increasingly inhibit the use of slave-labour, which owing to lack of incentives is notoriously inefficient. A decline in the number of captives obtained in wars, accompanying the political decline of the Sultanate, might have also been responsible for the disuse of slave-labour in crafts. As early as the latter half of the fourteenth century, Firūz Tughluq was compelled to prohibit the export of slaves, presumably to keep prices of slaves low within the Sultanate.<sup>2</sup> What is remarkable is that by the first quarter of the sixteenth century, India was no longer marked by that plenitude of slaves which had been such a characteristic feature of the Sultanate. Bābur mentions enthusiastically the large number of artisans in India, organized in castes, but does not have anything to say about slaves, let alone their numbers.<sup>3</sup> The detailed descriptions of Indian towns of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that we obtain from European travellers do not refer to slave-markets at all. Unlike those of the Sultanate, price lists of the Mughal empire no longer carry prices of slaves. It would, therefore, seem that both the supply of and the demand for slaves had declined. The former might have been hastened not only by the slaves' descendants winning their freedom and setting up as free artisans, but also by the gradual process whereby the caste artisans adjusted to the new conditions and learnt new skills and professions.

While immigration and enslavement made the growth of urban crafts possible, the basis on which these could subsist was provided by the increase in the revenues that the Sultanate ruling class could draw from the countryside. Whatever the detailed laws about property and taxation that the Islamic Law or *shari'at* contained in its finished form during the period of the Great Abbasids, the politics of the Islamic East by the twelfth century rested on the foundations of two elements of independent growth, that is, the *iqṭā'* and the *kharāj*, the latter clothed with a new significance not attaching to the term in classical Islamic Law. The *iqṭā'* was a transferable revenue assignment

1 Good mystics (like Shaikh Nizāmu'ddīn), therefore, prayed for the recovery of fugitive slaves by their masters (see *Fawā'idul Fu'ād*, pp. 425-6; *Khairu'l Majālis*, p. 184. The latter significantly has a story about a merchant's slave). It is true that Nizāmu'ddīn particularly lauded the act of manumitting a slave (*Fawā'idul Fu'ād*, pp. 5, 278-9, 339-40). But this attitude no more sanctioned the flight of a slave than the praise of charity sanctioned theft.

2 'Ainuddīn 'Abdullāh bin Māhrū, *Inshā-i Māhrū*, ed. S. A. Rashid and M. Bashir Husain (Lahore, 1965), p. 213.

3 *Bāburnāma*, tr., A. S. Beveridge (London, 1921), ii, 520. Bābur has only one reference to slave trade, when he mentions slaves (*barda*) among Indian exports through Kabul (ibid. i, 202).

by which members of the ruling class obtained their income, without any permanent attachment to any territory and in complete dependence on the Sultan. All its essentials are present in the definition given of it in Nizāmū-l Mulk Tūsī's celebrated *Siyāsatnāma* (eleventh century).<sup>1</sup> By providing for rigorous centralization, which gave the Sultan's government immense power over society, the *iqṭā'* was clearly an important factor in enabling the Sultan to demand a vast share of the surplus product of society.

This share took pre-eminently the form of *kharāj*, which had by now come to signify, in the form of a land-tax, the sovereign's claim to the bulk of the surplus which the peasant produced above the minimum needed for his subsistence. Only the possibility of complete devastation of the peasantry set any limits to its magnitude.<sup>2</sup> In the *iqṭā'*s, the assignees (designated *muqṭi's* or *wālīs*) collected the *kharāj* and other taxes and maintained themselves and their troops out of them, sending the surpluses to the Sultan's treasury. In the remaining areas (*khālīṣa*), the Sultan's officials directly collected the *kharāj* and other taxes. It was out of the enormous revenues so obtained that the Islamic principalities kept their armies and supported the existence of their large and numerous towns.

With the Ghorian conquests, the *iqṭā'* system was immediately established in northern India; and in spite of all the vicissitudes of royal power, the periodic transfer of *iqṭā'*s remained a marked feature of the thirteenth-century Sultanate.<sup>3</sup> But the imposition of the *kharāj* in its full-blown form took time. During a large part of the thirteenth century, the *muqṭi's* seem to have depended on tribute extorted from local potentates and on plunder (in the form of cattle and slaves) from the *mawāsāt* or unpacified areas.<sup>4</sup> It is to be assumed that local potentates (the *rāis*, *rānas* or *rānakas*, *rāutas* and others) went on collecting taxes and perquisites inherited from the previous regime. Of many of these taxes we know the names, but hardly anything more.<sup>5</sup> Some of the revenue so collected went as tribute to the Sultan's assignees.

One might therefore expect that the economic basis of the thirteenth-century Sultanate remained weak; and it is not surprising that the nobles living in Delhi during the reign of Balban were continually in debt for large sums of money to the moneylenders of Delhi, from whom they borrowed in anticipation of collections in their *iqṭā's*.<sup>6</sup> The situation altered radically only under 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī (1296-1316).

1 *Siyāsatnāma*, ed. Ja'far Shu'ār (Tehran, 1348), p. 44.

2 Cf. Seljūq documents cited in A. K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (London, 1953), pp. 74-5.

3 This emerges most clearly from the biographical sketches of a number of officers (*maliks*) of Iltutmish and his successors in *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, ii, 3-89. Cf. W. H. Moreland, *Agrarian System of Moslem India*, reprinted (Allahabad, n.d.), pp. 217-9.

4 For such raids in the *mawās* territories, see *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, ii, 17-8, 26-9, 53, 57-8, 71-2, 77. Balban's expeditions in the Doab and Katehr were essentially raids of this kind organized on a very large scale.

5 Cf. L. Gopal, *Economic Life of Northern India*, pp. 32-70; B. N. S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad, 1973), pp. 288-301.

6 Baranī, op.cit., p. 120.

It was 'Alā'uddīn who imposed a land-tax or *kharāj*, set to amount to half of the produce (in weight or value), throughout a very large region of northern India. It was supplemented by a house and cattle tax (*gharī* and *charāz*).<sup>1</sup> Baranī makes two contradictory statements, when he says, on the one hand, that the Sultan's officials by demanding revenue in cash immediately on harvest compelled the peasants to sell their grain to merchants taking it to the city;<sup>2</sup> and on the other, that 'Alā'uddīn ordered the tax to be collected in kind, the corn to be brought to the cities.<sup>3</sup> In the former case, a cash nexus must be assumed.<sup>4</sup> In either circumstance, the entire basis of the new taxation was the consumption of a large part of the agricultural surplus in the towns. In turn, as Baranī so logically explains, the new system of taxation enabled 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī to lower prices in Delhi and, presumably, the neighbouring cities.<sup>5</sup>

'Alā'uddīn Khaljī's agrarian measures naturally struck hard at other co-sharers of the surplus, namely, the local potentates and headmen, designated *chaudhurīs*, *khoṭs* and *muqaddams*; and the historian Baranī describes their humiliation with much satisfaction.<sup>6</sup> But it would seem excessive (building upon Baranī's claim that 'Alā'uddīn aimed at "preventing the tax-burden upon the strong from falling on the weak")<sup>7</sup> to treat 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī as a protector of the poor peasant.<sup>8</sup> He demanded tax at an equal rate from the headman (*khoṭ*) as well as the village menial (*balāhar*); and this was, indeed, regressive taxation with vigour. The real face of his agrarian administration is perhaps best revealed by 'Afif when he says that howsoever great might then be the oppression of the peasantry by officials (in the particular case narrated by him, a demand for advance payment of the year's revenue in cash), no one "dared make any babble or noise" during the time of Sultan 'Alā'uddīn.<sup>9</sup>

This was a situation quite different from the one under Muḥammad Tughluq (1325-51), when a further increase in taxation led to a very serious and long-drawn-out agrarian uprising in the Doab. Most peasants, but especially the *khoṭs* and *muqaddams*, turned into rebels.<sup>10</sup> The rebellion, the subsequent famine and Muḥammad Tughluq's well

1 Ibid. p. 287.

2 Ibid. pp. 304-5, 307.

3 Ibid. pp. 305-6.

4 The change to cash nexus was again a major new feature of the agrarian economy now established. The reference to tax-value of villages in monetary terms in a central Indian record of 1213 is significant, but does not necessarily imply that the revenue was actually paid by peasants in cash; and it would seem that Professor Sharma places too heavy a significance upon this single reference (*Indian Feudalism*, pp. 258-9).

5 Baranī, op.cit., pp. 303-19.

6 Ibid. pp. 287-8, 291. It is probable that many of the *rānakas* of the earlier period now survived as *chaudhurīs*, a designation first heard of only in the fourteenth century. As Ibn Battūṭa tells us (*Rihla*, Beirut text, p. 507), the *chandhurī* ("jantarī") was the head of a group of (one hundred) villages. The *rāntas* might often similarly have become *khoṭs* or village headmen; cf. Baranī, op.cit., pp. 287-8, 291, where it is said that *khoṭs* used to ride horses.

7 Baranī, op.cit., p. 287.

8 Cf. M. Habib, Introduction to a new edition of Elliot and Dowson, op.cit., p. 81.

9 'Afif, op.cit., pp. 37-8.

10 Baranī, op.cit., pp. 472-3. Cf. Yaḥyā, *Tārīkh-i Muḥarak-Shāhī* (Bib. Ind., Calcutta, 1931), pp. 101-2.

known harsh as well as palliative measures (including the first recorded instance of taccavi loans) were all consequences of the stormy implantation of an entirely new kind of agrarian taxation in India. Once implanted, the single massive land-tax was to last in India till practically the first half of this century. The state would henceforth regularly claim the bulk of the peasants' surplus, and so assume (in the eyes of an acute observer like Bernier) the practical aspect of the sole proprietor of land in the country.

Once established, the new land revenue system enabled the Sultanate ruling class to appropriate a large part of the country's surplus. In essence, it meant the entire or partial replacement of rural superior classes by an urban ruling class. Owing to the centralization of their entire political structure, the nobles of the Sultanate could not disperse themselves into the country, and therefore spent most of their income in towns.<sup>1</sup> This urban setting also suited the entire cultural tradition to which they were heirs, and which determined to a large part the kinds of goods and services they and their dependents, followers and hangers-on stood in need of.

In very broad terms, then, the two major changes that Professor Habib had ascribed to the Sultanate, namely, an advance in urbanization and a reduction in the power of the local hereditary rural potentates, are substantiated by actual evidence. But these changes did not arise out of the "liberation" of any section of society. On the contrary, slave-labour, for a time at least, acquired crucial importance in the urban economy. It was undoubtedly a major channel for the gradual growth of an urban Muslim artisan class,<sup>2</sup> standing outside the rigorous framework of the caste system, and so contributing an important element of competition and mobility in the organization of Indian craft-production, though such an element was not wholly absent from Indian caste society at any time. There is no evidence of any direct assault from the state or the Muslims upon the caste system;<sup>3</sup> nor even of any revolt from within, until the late fifteenth century, when Kabīr's verses might suggest the first misgivings of the artisan over caste restraints and his own lowly position within the social order.

The agrarian changes also spelled no relaxation in the pressure on the peasantry. The new land-tax, being heavy and regressive, ground down the lower peasantry. The peasants were not allowed to leave the land; and one could with justification ask, as a

1 Cf. Irfan Habib, "Distribution of Landed Property in pre-British India", *Enquiry*, ii, no. 3 (1965), 52-3.

2 One must here be on guard against a mistranslation in Mrs A. S. Beveridge's rendering of Bābur's *Memoirs*, suggesting that in his time all artisans were Hindus (*Bāburnāma*, tr., ii, 518). The original word is 'āmīl, meaning not artisan, but revenue-collector. See 'Abdur Raḥīm's Persian translation, Br. Mus. MS. Or. 3714, f. 410b. The corresponding sentence is omitted in the Turki text of the Hyderabad Codex, edited by Mrs Beveridge (London, 1905; reprint, 1971), f. 290a. Neither in that edition, nor in her translation, does Mrs Beveridge notice the absence of this sentence in the Turki text.

3 If one assembles the criticisms of Hinduism in Muslim writings of the Sultanate period, these can be reduced to a disappointingly small list: The Hindus are polytheists and idol worshippers and are enemies of Islam. I have not so far come across a single Muslim criticism of Hindus for following the caste system, for believing in "untouchability", or for the custom of *satī*. The last, at least, was admired by poets like Amīr Khusrāu.

correspondent of Māhrū did in the fourteenth century, what the use was of their being regarded legally as of "free birth" (*hurr asl*).<sup>1</sup>

What the Sultanate brought about was not a social revolution in any modern sense, but the creation of a new system of agrarian exploitation, with a parasitical urban growth based upon it. It united political power with economic power more fully than ever before, vesting the control over the bulk of the surplus in the hands of a ruling class whose composition was determined not by inheritance but formally by the will of the sovereign, and whose individual members remained unattached to any particular parcels of land.<sup>2</sup> The denial of rights to the peasant, who remained as semi-serf, might make the system appear "feudal"; the huge centralization of power, on the other hand, answered to the conception of "Oriental Despotism". The cash nexus, the growth of towns and commerce, however, belied these appearances; and a large volume of urban production, as we have seen, was a characteristic feature of the new system. In lieu of a proper technical name, we have no option but to designate the economic organization established under the Sultanate as the Indian medieval economy. In its essential features the economy continued to function under the Mughal empire, when indeed it would seem to have achieved its most developed form.<sup>3</sup>

#### APPENDIX

In this Appendix, I propose to examine the views of Professor L. Gopal and Professor K. S. Lal on the economic role of the Sultanate.

The conclusion that Professor Gopal reaches after a few pages of discussion on India under the sultans is as follows:

It would therefore appear that though the economic exploitation of the country took place in a large and systematic manner later on, India had become poor after the establishment of the Muslim power.<sup>4</sup>

The main argument rests on the thesis that the new rulers, in contrast to their predecessors, perpetrated plunder and massacre on a frightful scale, and thereby reduced a prosperous country to misery. For this, Professor Gopal cites facts from authorities which include, appropriately, the *Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan* Volumes and that important piece of research, *An Advanced History of India*. One of his two proofs is that Shams Sirāj 'Afīf praises the prosperity of Jānagar, showing thereby that Hindu kingdoms, untainted by

1 *Ishā-i Māhrū*, pp. 61-3. 'Ainul Mulk Māhrū's own letter is in justification of the demand that certain peasants must be returned to their original village, from which they had fled.

2 Until, that is, Firūz Tughluq was compelled to grant concessions to his nobles, allowing for inheritance as well as non-transfer of assignments (*Futūhāt-i Firūz-Shāhī*, ed. S. A. Rashid, Aligarh, p. 18; 'Afīf, op.cit., pp. 96, 474-5, 482).

3 I venture here to refer to my own analysis of the main elements of the economy of the Mughal period in my paper "Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India", *Enquiry*, N.S., No. 3 (Old Series, No. 15), Winter, 1971, and the larger work, *Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Bombay, 1963).

4 L. Gopal, *Economic Life of Northern India*, p. 261.

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the touch of Muslims, maintained a high level of per capita income. The other is that Nikitin in the fifteenth century speaks of the poverty of Indians. He being the "first foreign visitor" to do so, it would appear that poverty in India was then of recent growth.

We shall presently meet again the argument about the enormous consequences of the "murders and massacres" of the sultans, in the demographic researches of Professor K. S. Lal. The assembling of data about military campaigns and devastations is unexceptionable, when made in order to judge their effects on economic and social life.<sup>1</sup> But in order to establish that these were on a larger scale in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries than in the ninth and the tenth, we must equally have data about the earlier centuries. The fact that for the earlier two centuries we have no sources of information does not mean that no such devastation took place at that time. Quantity X cannot simply be treated as *nil*. Secondly, there must be a careful scrutiny of other factors which could have mitigated the effects of destruction or plunder. Moreover, much as one might dislike it, the despoilment of one section by another does not necessarily, if at all, represent a diminution of national wealth.

As to 'Afif's praise of the prosperity of Jānagar, Professor Gopal would have found, had he turned to the original work, that 'Afif actually speaks in much more specific terms of the prosperity of the peasantry in Fīrūz Tughluq's empire. In their houses, he says:

So much grain, wealth, horses and goods accumulated that one cannot speak of them. Everyone had a large amount of gold and silver and countless goods. None of the women-folk remained without ornaments. In every peasant's house, there were clean bed-sheets, excellent bed-cots, many articles and much wealth.<sup>2</sup>

Quite an impossible description. It can surely be as little used to demonstrate that the sultans brought prosperity to India, as one can treat 'Afif's reference to Jānagar for proving that the Hindu kingdoms were free from poverty.

As for Nikitin being the first foreign visitor to refer to the misery of the common people, the amusing thing is that he says no more than what Professor Gopal says a few pages earlier with regard to pre-Sultanate India: that the lords were rich and the ordinary people miserable.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, since Ibn Baṭṭūṭa fails to make a statement of this kind in the fourteenth century, is it to be construed that India was prosperous during that century, and became poor only during the succeeding hundred years? One must remember that Nikitin was one of the first European travellers after Marco Polo:

1 As, for example, in Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, i (London, 1962), 3-56.

2 *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī*, Asiatic Society of Bengal, pp. 99-100. Gopal's source for 'Afif's passage on Jānagar is H. C. Ray's *Dynastic History of India*.

3 Nikitin's statement is simply this: "The land (Bahmanī kingdom) is overstocked with people; but those in the country are miserable, whilst the nobles are extremely opulent and delight in luxury" (tr. in R. H. Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, London, 1857, p. 14). Compare Gopal on his period (700-1200): "India still (!) remained prosperous; but the prosperity was monopolised by the rulers, including the feudal chiefs, the merchants and temples. The common villager of our period was often in a miserable condition" (*Economic Life of Northern India*, p. 257).



and it is not reasonable to set his account side by side with, say, the Arab accounts of tenth-century India, which were addressed to a different audience with different interests.

The cursory inroad into the Sultanate made by Professor Gopal finds a lengthy supplement, as it were, in Professor K. S. Lal's demonstration of the grave extent of depopulation under the Sultanate. Since the performance of pre-modern economies is often judged by changes in the size of population, the subject taken up by Lal is of some relevance. He has achieved the remarkable feat of estimating Indian population century by century from A.D. 1000 onwards. The figures, as drawn from his own table,<sup>1</sup> are:

Year	Estimated population (in millions)	"Percentage variation from previous century"
A.D. 1000	200	—
1100	180	— 10.00
1200	190	+ 5.50
1300	175	— 7.89
1400	170	— 2.86
1500	125	— 26.47

These figures, postulating decline by over a third (37.5%) in the course of the three centuries of the Sultanate (1200-1500), would imply "murder and massacre" on a grand scale, indeed.

Lal, indeed, heightens the contrast with ancient India by accepting the figure of 100 millions for c. 300 B.C., estimated by Pran Nath, on the basis of fantastic "data".<sup>2</sup> He then fixes upon 200 millions for A.D. 1000, and thus establishes a consistent growth of population for ancient India, reaching at its close a level that substantially exceeded the population estimated by Kingsley Davis for 1800.<sup>3</sup>

We should therefore, first, look into the evidence behind this massive number for India on the eve of Mahmūd of Ghaznī's invasions. This evidence, obligingly offered to us by Lal, is, however, not for a mere 200 millions, but for 600 millions. Firishta, according to Mr Jatindra Mohan Dutta, gives this estimate for "the beginning of the Muhammadan conquest". Since Firishta wrote early in the seventeenth century, his authority for such an estimate must remain dubious. But even the fact that Firishta made such an estimate is, to say the least, dubious. Professor Lal (as well as the present writer) failed to locate the estimate in Firishta's text.<sup>4</sup> But no matter: Mr J. M.

1 K. S. Lal, op. cit., p. 92.

2 Pran Nath, *A Study in the Economic Condition of Ancient India* (London, 1929), pp. 117-23. The data used are numbers of *grāmas* ("estates") in Buddhist literature for tracts of unknown limits; the "war-strength" enumerated in the *Mahābhārata* and Greek accounts; and the *A'in-i Akbari*! Sample of reasoning: If eight ancient Indian "countries" had 700,000 fighting men, eighty-four countries should have 7,350,000 (p. 121).

3 Kingsley Davis, *Population of India and Pakistan* (New Jersey, 1951), p. 26, estimates 125 millions for 1800.

4 Undaunted, Professor Lal remarks that Firishta "does give the impression that India on the eve of Muslim conquest was a very large (for this, indeed, one does need his evidence!) and populous country" (*Growth of Muslim Population*, p. 32). One, however, fails to discover anything of this kind in the pages cited (Nawal Kishore press edn. i. 17-28), which are concerned with an account of the Ghaznavid invasions.



Dutta has liberally scaled it down to "200 to 300 million". For no particular reason, while whole-heartedly accepting Dutta's estimate, Professor Lal forgets the 300 millions and henceforth speaks of only 200 millions as a firm figure for the population of the year 1000. It would seem, then, that the figure of 200 millions is really and truly a figment of the imagination of one scholar resting on nothing more tangible than the imagination of another, of Professor Lal's on Mr Dutta's. Such is the sum total of the evidence.

For his further explorations into medieval demography, Lal takes as his red thread, the remarks of the same Mr Jatindra Mohan Dutta, which he approvingly quotes:

During centuries of invasions, constant oppression and misrule, the wholesale massacres during the Pathan period, the population of India dwindled.... This broad fact emerges from the two estimates (Firishta's and Moreland's).<sup>1</sup>

From A.D. 1000 onwards Professor Lal proceeds to chop off India's population at every century according to his estimate of the scale of slaughter perpetrated during it. The invasions of Maḥmūd of Ghaznī accounted for the great decline in the eleventh century. Here one notices another enchanting feature of Professor Lal's method: he postulates a decline of population when he has simply reduced the area of coverage.<sup>2</sup>

Why Professor Lal considers the twelfth century a period of population growth is left unexplained by him, since he never bothers to discuss in his text the estimate for 1200 given in his table. Presumably, this was a contribution of Prithvīrāja. As for the next century, a more or less chronological account of the sultans' military campaigns serves to justify for him the assumption of continuous depopulation. From this rather nebulous kind of evidence remarkably precise figures follow: a population of 175 millions for 1300 (given in the table, not discussed in the text); and of 160 millions for 1351 (Muḥammad Tughluq's death).<sup>3</sup> No need of quantitative evidence here; just inner light.

But now Professor Lal proceeds to demonstrate how one should really use quantitative evidence, should one get it. 'Afif has given the *jama*' (estimated revenue) of Firūz Tughluq's empire as 6,75,00,000 *tankas* at one place; 6,85,00,000 at another.<sup>4</sup> Professor Lal chooses, without explanation, the number 6,75,00,000. He appears to suppose further that it is equal to the total gross amount of land revenue demand (not net collection). He then assumes (without letting the reader into the secret, that there is no evidence for such a supposition) that the land-tax at that time amounted uniformly to one-third of the produce. So he proceeds to multiply 'Afif's *jama*' figure by 3, to get the total amount of the produce. Having done so, Lal now deducts the share of the non-food crops, together with that part of the food crops which was eaten away by wild

1 Quoted, K. S. Lal, op.cit., p. 32. Moreland estimated India's population in 1605 at 100 millions (*India At the Death of Akbar*, London, 1920, p. 22).

2 On p. 38, he says, "recession of frontiers (under the Ghaznavid invasions) meant a smaller India with a smaller population". Punjab becoming a "foreign land". Yet he continues to compare, on p. 92, his own population of the "shrunk India" of 1100 and 1200 with that of Greater India of 1000 (op. cit., p. 38).

3 Ibid. p. 49.

4 'Afif, op.cit., pp. 94, 296.

and tame animals ("nibbling in the fields") as well as by animals deliberately fed on harvested crops. He here seems to overlook the fact that what "the rodents, birds and animals" ate off the field would not be part of the grain actually harvested in any calculation, and so should have been already excluded from the gross figure. Be as it may, he tells us that of the total agricultural production, only one-third should have remained for human consumption. Now even if one allowed that non-food crops constituted one-third of the total agricultural production, leaving only two-thirds for food crops, it would still be an incredible assertion that elephants, horses and cattle consumed a share of the foodgrains equal to that of human beings, however prominent a role might be assigned to those animals in "medieval husbandry" and way of life.<sup>1</sup>

Having thus inflated and then deflated 'Afif's figure of the *jama*', to represent the total value of foodgrains available for human consumption, Lal proceeds to divide it by the cost of foodgrain consumption per head. The latter is worked out by a method of staggering simplicity. Assume the same amount of grain consumption per head (about 200 kilograms) as now in the whole of India, convert it into fourteenth-century weights *a la* Thomas,<sup>2</sup> and then multiply it by the average price of foodgrains. This last is achieved by drawing a simple unweighted average of prices of wheat, barley, paddy and pulses. It is characteristic of Lal's method that he omits to tell the reader that of his four prices three only are drawn from 'Afif for the reign of Firuz Tughluq;<sup>3</sup> and that the price for paddy is the one given by Barani for the reign of 'Ala'uddin Khalji<sup>4</sup> a whole half century earlier. Nor does he let the reader know that both these writers quote the prices for Delhi, so that these have nothing to do with harvest prices in the various regions of the Empire, which alone should be of relevance for his purpose. Brushing away all these complexities, Lal makes his simple calculations, and enlarging his result for Firuz Tughluq's empire into one for the whole of India arrives at a very convenient figure of 170 millions.

A careful reader will, however, notice that this figure would have to be raised by a large percentage simply because Lal has used city-market prices, and not harvest prices, which must have been much lower. One hundred and seventy millions would only be a "floor"-figure. It would again have to be raised further, if one allows that the foodgrains available for consumption could not possibly have formed less than half of the total agricultural production (in value). We would then have a minimum figure of 257 millions! If one now remembers that Lal's assumption of one-third as the share of produce taken in land revenue has no basis in evidence, and it could have been anything from, say, one-fourth to a half, any figure ranging from 147 to 295 millions would be as good as any other. The minimum could be lowered further, if we assume that with a lower population the grain consumption per head in the regions in question was larger. A figure like 250 kilograms per head would reduce the minimum to barely 118

1 K. S. Lal, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

2 E. Thomas, *The Chronicles of the Pathan Kings of Delhi* (London, 1871), pp. 161-3.

3 'Afif, *op.cit.*, p. 294. Lal has "pulses", for which read "gram".

4 Barani, *op.cit.*, p. 305. Lal does not cite either 'Afif or Barani, but Thomas, *op.cit.*, pp. 160, 260, 283.

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millions. Such is the large range of possibilities (anything from 118 to 295 millions!), if one wants to follow Lal in assigning demographic significance to 'Afif's *jama*' figure.

For the fifteenth century, Lal postulates in his table a decrease of nothing less than 26.47 per cent (so precise is the percentage!). Yet when we turn to his text, we find no mention at all of this estimate for 1500 (viz., 125 millions). He informs us that because of "a very unhappy political situation", the loss of population "was colossal". No perhaps or possibly—but solid fact. His actual evidence for absolute depopulation is nil. Since it does not suit his purpose here, he ignores that sentence from Nikitin, which Professor Lallanji Gopal has found so illuminating. For Nikitin there says that the Bahmani kingdom was "overstocked with people"—a statement which, had it been made for some earlier century, Lal would surely have cited to support his vision of a vast population in India during the earlier and happier days.